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of Obtaining Military Information

(Editorial Report) When the court convened, Defendant Farhan Abd al-Hadi al-Atasi, a representative of a television film company, was called to the dock. Asked by the court president to explain the method by which he obtained information connected with the security of the army, the defendant declared that late in 1951 he went to the United States to continue his studies. He said that after completing a four-month course in English, he went to an engineering school where he studied for two years. He later joined a night school in New York and attended a course in administration.

The defendant said that six months later he was employed by the Metropolitan Equitable Life Insurance Company and later worked for a commercial center. Continuing his evidence, defendant Al-Atasi said that in 1955 he joined S.H. Magro and Partners Contracting Company which sent him to Saudi Arabia to work on the Riyadh-Jidda-Medina railroad which the company was constructing. The defendant declared that he was in Saudi Arabia for about six or seven months and then returned to the United States where he again joined the life insurance company and met his wife Joan Ghanim.

The defendant also said that in the meantime he had obtained American citizenship, and in 1959 he came to Beirut with his wife for the purpose of settling his affairs in Syria and then returning to the states to settle permanently there. At this point, the court president asked: "Did you have any connections with any of the American networks before you came to Beirut, and did you contact anybody there?" The defendant replied: "Never." The court president here interpolated that this was ridiculous, and the defendant said that his contacts in the United States were confined to Arab students only.

Al-Atasi added that on arriving in Beirut he was received by his brother and that he told his brother that he intended to stay two months in Lebanon and liquidate his property in Syria and then return to the United States to start his own business. His brother, the defendant said, insisted that he should go to Syria and see the family. The defendant then explained that his father called on him in Beirut and asked him to go to Syria and try life there for a few months and then decide whether to stay for good or return to the United States. He added that he complied with his father's advice and went to Homs, Syria. He said that when he was in Syria he submitted an application to the security department relinquishing his Syrian citizenship--UAR citizenship at that time. The application was granted, the defendant said, but formalities took about seven or eight months.

Replying to a question by the court president, the defendant said that when he was in Beirut he was a guest in a hotel and that he only contacted his relatives there. Questioned further by the court president, Al-Atasi said that a passport and immigration department official, Mazhar al-Azm, told him that it was not necessary for him to obtain a residence permit and that it was possible to grant him a Syrian identity card. The court president ridiculed this allegation and wondered whether the defendant had tried to bribe any officials or whether somebody has been using his influence in his favor. The defendant denied all this and said that he obtained an identity card after submitting an application through the head of the quarter where he was residing.